

Pastoral letter for Wesley Ebenezer  
For week beginning 22nd November 2020

Dear sisters and brothers,

How are you? I'd really like you to take a moment to think about how you are feeling. Up or down maybe? Physically fit or maybe a bit shaky? Or maybe very tired. Take some time to take your emotional temperature. Are you able to pray at the moment?

I've been confined to home for 10 days by the Track and Trace system. I'm grateful that I've not had any Covid symptoms. My first day out of the flat was Tuesday. The whole world looked very bright and real to me, having been confined to quarters for what felt like a long time. We've been out walking along the River Don this morning, looking for the elusive kingfisher, (we only ever see one at a time!), and giving thanks for God's huge generosity in giving us this planet to care for. We didn't see the kingfisher, but the river was unusually still and deep today and the sun shone gloriously. And we managed to smile over our masks at people as we met them on the path.

I confess however that I have struggled with the Bible readings appointed for this coming week, the last in our liturgical year. Next Sunday is the start of our church year, with the first Sunday in Advent and the story of the coming of God into our world as a baby, both human and divine. But this week's lectionary is about judgement and grace.

My 70th birthday last month prompted a lot of speculation among the grandchildren about when I was expecting to die. I did wonder who had put them up to this! I managed to say that I wasn't quite ready to die yet but I am really looking forward to going to heaven, which is true but sounds a bit over-confident in retrospect.

One of our best loved hymns includes the line:

"Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own!"  
Singing the Faith 345, Charles Wesley.

I still shiver inside when we sing this, not feeling very bold about it at all. It seems incredible to me that ordinary people like ourselves who have had, (I speak for myself here!) fairly ordinary lives, can have been part of GOD's plan for the creation of the universe from the beginning. In fact it's mind-blowing. But that's one of the great themes of the Bible.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, just before his betrayal and death on the Cross, a parable about the "Final Judgement".

*Jesus said: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all of his angels, he will sit on his royal throne. The people of all nations will be brought before him, and he will separate them, as shepherds separate their sheep from their goats.*

*He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, "My father has blessed you! Come and receive the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created.*

*When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me, and when I was naked, you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me, and when I was in jail, you visited me."*

*Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, "When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?"*

*The king will answer, "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me."*

*Then the king will say to those on his left, "Get away from me! You are under God's curse. Go into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! I was hungry, but you did not give me anything to eat, and I was thirsty, but you did not give me anything to drink. I was a stranger, but you did not welcome me, and I was naked but you did not give me any clothes to wear. I was sick and in jail, but you did not take care of me."*

*Then the people will ask, "Lord, when did we fail to help you when you were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?"*

*The king will say to them, "Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me."*

*Then Jesus said, "Those people will be punished forever. But the ones who pleased God will have eternal life."*

*Matthew 25: verses 31 to 46. CEV.*

What I've never really understood about this passage is why neither of these groups of people actually remember any of the good deeds they did or any of the people in need that they had or hadn't helped.

Do you think it could be something about the "Holy Habits"? Is the behaviour of the early Christians in Acts 2; 42 to 47 a template for how we should be living two thousand years later? I'd be glad if anyone has any thoughts on this and would like to share them with me.

As always, please get in touch with me if you'd like to talk. My email address is Sue.Stanworth@ [gmail.com](mailto:Sue.Stanworth@gmail.com) and my mobile no is 07989 533075.

May the Lord bless you and keep you as this year draws to a close. Let us pray together that we may serve our King as we meet the needs of others. We can pray for people whose access to food and clean water is denied because of famine, climate change, natural disaster and war. We can give as we are able to charities who give relief to the hungry. We are already helping each other out in these Covid times with food shopping and meal preparation.

As winter approaches, we can put pressure on the authorities to find the money to house the homeless again here in Sheffield.

We must continue to pray for those who are ill at home or in hospital, that they may know the peace of the Lord.

We can pray for criminals and for prisoners of conscience, activists who are wrongfully imprisoned and for those who are held in camps for displaced people, refugees and asylum seekers.

In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

With every blessing,  
Sue S